A PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM PILOTED IN THE FOURTH GRADE AT BLACK EARTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

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Despite concerns about increasing violence by educational officials, parents, and community members, most school programs do not provide students specific educational experiences that facilitate adequate personal and social development. Some schools, nationally, have addressed this need by offering educational programs teaching conflict resolution skills through peer mediation. The purpose of this study was to determine

whether a peer mediation program piloted in a fourth grade population would encourage students to use conflict resolution skills to resolve disputes peacefully. The model used is called the Peers in Education Addressing Conflict Effectively (PEACE) Program, whose goal is to teach appropriate conflict resolution skills, and decrease hostility in the school environment.

Fifteen mediators, selected by their peers, were taught the PEACE program skills of conflict resolution. These skills include communication, reflective listening, identifying feelings and problem solving. The mediators were trained by the author and another staff member who had been trained in the PEACE Program.

The time frame of the study was from January 1999 to January 2000. Information was gathered through questionnaires given to peer mediators, a questionnaire answered by the fourth grade population and fourth grade teachers, anecdotal records and observations from participating teachers and the school principal. Results of the study did not show a reduction in antisocial behavior or reduced violence in the school. The findings did suggest that the mediators learned the conflict resolution skills, but because of the time schedule, opportunities to practice and use them were limited. Students and teachers did demonstrate positive interest in the program; students wanted to become trained mediators and teachers and administrators supported the concept of peaceful problem-solving. Data collected from the study will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, identifying strengths and weaknesses for future program implementations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> *"As a society we have not bothered to make sure every child is taught the essentials of handling anger or resolving conflicts positively – nor have we bothered to teach empathy, impulse control, or any of the other fundamentals of emotional competence."*
>
> *(Goleman 1995)*

In public schools around the country, students, teachers, parents and administrators share a common concern: that is, schools need to do a better job of teaching children how to get along with each other. "It wasn't my fault, he hit me first," or "I'll tell the teacher on you," or, "Just wait until school is out, I'll get you back" are comments indicative of how some children deal with daily conflict. If schools are to be safe havens for learning, then teaching children skills to help them get along with each other is basic.

When social problems leading to violent acts invade communities nationwide, schools are asked to fix them. If it is true that children in schools at all grade levels seem to be more disruptive, with less internal control, then something must be done. Random student violence and continual disruptive behavior generate a school malaise fed by hopelessness and helplessness (Curwin 1997). Fighting is the only way that some students know to maintain dignity, win the respect of peers, or to be successful. Even if most students are not chronically violent, those who are cause fear and disruption for everyone else. There is little learning in an environment permeated by fear.

Curwin (1997) believes that by facing school violence as a challenge and as a responsibility, schools can be made safer and, even better, can help society change as a whole. He proposes three basic program elements in an effective anti-violence campaign: *1) teach students alternatives to violence, 2) teach students how to make more effective choices, and 3) model alternative expressions of anger, frustration, and impatience for students.* To accomplish these goals, Curwin includes skills in conflict resolution, peer mediation, and anger control as examples of alternatives to violence. Comprehensive teacher training sessions in these areas are included. The very skills that teachers expect their students to learn, i.e., listening, critical, creative thinking, anger control, decision-making, and other elements of conflict resolution are presented and taught to all school staff through in-service days or workshops. Curwin writes, "There is probably no skill more important than active listening to diffuse potentially troublesome situations. Students misbehave when they feel anxious, fearful, or angry. Teachers who learn how to identify with students who have negative feelings and who can convey understanding and empathy through reflective or active listening are usually able to short-circuit the cycle that leads to disruption" (Curwin and Mendler 1988, 14). Teachers can teach their students positive skills both for preventing disruptive events and for dealing with the consequences of violent encounters. Once students have the skills, they need to know when to use them and how to choose among them. A peer mediation program is one way to offer students choices, give them the opportunity to practice choosing, and give them the feeling that they can control their lives (Curwin 1997). The more students believe

they can make real choices that affect their lives, the more they may feel capable of selecting nonviolent alternatives.

Schools have attempted to manage interpersonal conflicts among students by various models of discipline. Referrals to the principal's office, parent notification, detention, suspension, and expulsion may work short term, but these approaches have not reduced the episodes of antisocial behavior exhibited by students (Satchel 1992, 6).

National attention focused on the violence in schools has helped to promote nation-wide school violence prevention plans. One of the goals in most public school mission statements is that students learn to become responsible citizens of their communities. Can one become a responsible citizen without learning how to peacefully interact with other people and be responsible for one's actions? It is increasingly important that conflict resolution skills are taught to students throughout their school years.

The premise of this paper is that creating a peer mediation program may be one way in which schools can reduce hostility. The goal of peer mediation or conflict resolution is to increase the students' skills to settle their disputes within their peer groups and to problem solve in a safe and supportive environment. It does not seek to prevent conflicts from occurring, since conflict is an unavoidable part of everyday life, but rather to increase the beneficial consequences of conflict by making it a learning experience (Bercovitch 1984). Violent response to conflict may be replaced with communication skills, creative problem-solving techniques, and better decision-making skills – when given the opportunity to learn and practice them. Reports of meaningful studies and a review of literature will amplify and legitimize the study. Discussion of the implementation of a pilot program in the Black Earth Elementary School in the Wisconsin Heights School District was the focus of the present study.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Sporadic research has been conducted on conflict within schools. DeCecco and Richards (1974) conducted the most comprehensive study more than twenty-five years ago. More than eight thousand students and five hundred faculty members in more than sixty junior and senior high schools in the New York City, Philadelphia, and San Francisco areas were interviewed. Over 90% of the conflicts reported by students were perceived either to be unresolved or resolved in destructive ways. Open negotiation of conflicts was practically nonexistent. The conclusion was that within schools individuals are either trying to shun conflict or to crush the opposition. Johnson, Johnson, and Dudley (1992) found in their research that the nature of the most frequent conflicts occurring among students, strategies students use to resolve their conflicts, and the impact of conflict management training programs on students' ability to manage their conflicts constructively had not been adequately studied. In addition, their findings showed that in order to manage their conflicts constructively, there must be a shared understanding of the procedures required to manage conflicts constructively and students must master the specific skills required to use these procedures. Starting in 1993, the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management launched a three-year evaluation of several school-based conflict management programs in Ohio. Seventeen elementary and secondary schools in Ohio participated in the study. The Commission collected data through interviews with conflict management program coordinators, students, teachers, administrators, parents and from reviewing records on disciplinary actions and mediations. According to the project's Final Report, most students improved their attitudes toward conflict, increased their understanding of

nonviolent problem-solving methods, and enhanced their communications skills. While the assessment of the program overall was generally positive, the evaluation does not prove in a quantitative way that the programs result in students gaining life skills. Terry Wheeler, Associate Director of the Ohio Commission, states that in an "overwhelming qualitative way, on a school-by-school basis, kids are learning life skills." Some of the hurdles the Commission encountered in forming its general conclusions were variability in school disciplinary policies, unreliable statistics on violent incidents, and different definitions of violence among schools. The Commission was able to conclude that schools that had more comprehensive programs teaching all children conflict management concepts and skills, rather than just offering peer mediation, had the best results. The Final Report cautions that "Solid results take time to develop. Conflict management programs should not be expected to provide a quick fix." (School Conflict Management Demonstration Project, N.A.M.E. 1995).

The objective of the present study was to assess a peer mediation program taught specifically at the fourth grade level. The findings of the pilot program may help to more effectively implement a peer mediation program in the second elementary school in the same district.

The model for the study is called Peers in Education Addressing Conflict Effectively (PEACE). PEACE is a statewide Wisconsin elementary school-based conflict mediation initiative sponsored by the Office of the Attorney General and the State Bar of Wisconsin (Appendix H). The Wisconsin Heights School District was selected to participate in the PEACE program in the summer of 1998, subsequent to an application submitted by the author.

The goal of PEACE is to reduce the level of violence in Wisconsin elementary schools by teaching children how to resolve their conflicts non-violently. PEACE seeks to meet this challenge by providing conflict resolution training to school staff. Interested administrators, counselors, teachers, and/or parents (up to six total) were invited to a two day training session to learn the steps in the mediation process, learn and practice communications skills (used in conflict resolution), and question other schools in the state who have implemented PEACE in their schools. It was then up to the trained staff to equip students with the skills to recognize, understand, and resolve conflicts – the mission of the peer mediation project. In undertaking this effort, the State Bar of Wisconsin funds the training sessions each summer, pays for initial curriculum materials to get schools started in the program, and provides volunteer attorneys to assist participating schools in "kicking off" their programs by leading swearing-in sessions for mediators, and discussing with students the importance of their PEACE mission.

In 1998, thirty-five elementary schools in Wisconsin had implemented peer mediation programs after being introduced to the PEACE program. Despite the widespread use of the PEACE program in Wisconsin elementary schools, there have been no reported studies conducted to indicate whether this particular program in conflict resolution has done what it set out to do in 1995; that is, to reduce the level of violence in Wisconsin schools by teaching and practicing the skills endorsed in their program. This Black Earth Elementary School pilot project was implemented and the study conducted to assess: 1) the incidence of change of attitude and behavior in the target population (fourth grade) after training in communication skills, creative problem-solving techniques, and better decision-making skills, and 2) the effectiveness of the implementation of the

PEACE model in reducing violence. The results will help determine how to best design a Peer Mediation Program as part of a total school violence prevention effort.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This paper reports on the development and the evaluation process of a pilot program in peer mediation with a fourth grade population in one elementary school in rural Wisconsin, the hypothesis being that teaching appropriate conflict resolution skills is the first step in reducing violence in the schools.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

(Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary 1985).

Conflict: *from the Latin-confligere, to clash together*. A disagreement between people; a controversy. As used in this paper: a clash, incompatibility, opposing values, needs, or wishes. If ignored or mishandled, conflict may lead to aggression and physical violence.

Disputant: *Latin-disputare, to reckon, discuss*. A person who engages in arguments or discussion. This paper: a fourth grade student who brings his/her conflict with opposing disputant to a mediation session for discussion with trained mediators.

Mediation: *Latin: mediare, to be in the middle.* The attempt to bring about a peaceful settlement or compromise between disputing

persons or nations. This paper: a voluntary process between four students whereby conflicts are heard, discussed, and hopefully resolved.

Mediator: *Latin: mediare, to be in the middle.* A person who serves as an intermediary to reconcile differences. This paper: a fourth grade student trained in the conflict resolution process as outlined in the PEACE program.

Peace education: *Latin: pacisci, to confirm an agreement, harmony, calm. Latin: educare, to train or teach, development of knowledge and skills*. This paper: programs that teach skills to promote harmony and calmness in the environment. The focus is on reducing violence in schools.

Peer: *Latin: par, meaning equal.* A person who has equal standing with another, as in rank, class, or age. This paper: a fourth grade student.

Peer Mediation Program: This paper: a plan with fourth grade students that has as its goal the teaching of problem-solving skills to improve the relationship between people, reduce aggressive behavior, and build a peaceful community.

LIMITATIONS

The pilot program targets a small population that may not be representative of the entire elementary school district. The three teachers of the fourth grade students involved in the project were not trained in the PEACE program. They did provide support to the program by allowing the mediators and disputants time out of class to participate in the mediation. The following list presents other limitations of this study:

- Some students who may have become competent mediators were not chosen. This may be due to the selection process; the mediators were elected by the fourth grade students – this may have been viewed as a popularity contest. "Popular" students may have been chosen and unpopular students who may have become competent mediators were not chosen.
- Due to the late start of the mediation sessions in the school year, the number of conflicts heard may not have been representative of the total year's problems.
- Limited exposure of the program because of its newness.
- Time constraints because of school staff responsibilities and student activities in the second semester (time of program implementation).
- Minimal school-wide staff involvement – for example, playground supervisors may not have known about peer mediation.
- Questionable continuation of program at the middle school level.

- Confidentiality between students may have been less than perfect due to a small target population.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Every day approximately 100,000 children are assaulted at school. In addition, 5,000 teachers are threatened with physical assaults and 200 are actually attacked (Lorion 1998). In a national survey of 1,261 school administrators (Boothe et al. 1993), 97% indicated that school violence was increasing across the United States and in their neighboring school districts. In an April 1993 national survey of 2,508 students in Grades 7 to 12, sponsored by the Joyce Foundations (Harris 1993), 73% of the students indicated that violence was increasing in schools across the country. During 1996-1997, almost 4,000 incidents of rape or other types of sexual battery were reported in our nation's public schools. There were about 11,000 incidents of physical attacks or fights in which weapons were used and 7,000 robberies in schools that year (Mansfield, et al. 1991). In the short span of one year (1997-1998) there were school shootings by middle and high school students in West Paducah, Kentucky; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Pearl, Mississippi, and Springfield, Oregon. Students and residents in these cities share painful memories of broken lives – the result of bloodshed on school property.

No age or grade is immune as evidenced by the following reports: In December 1997, a fourth grader in Mountain Grove, Missouri, brought his parents' 9 mm handgun to school. A teacher confiscated the weapon when he

produced the gun for show and tell. In March 1998, after a female student teased him about his ears, an 8-year-old Indianapolis elementary school student brought a loaded .25 caliber pistol, stolen from his 19-year-old brother, to school. He was expelled after pointing the gun at the girl. In May 1998, a five-year-old Memphis, Tennessee boy took a loaded .25 caliber pistol to school after he had been given a "time-out" by his kindergarten teacher. According to authorities, the child had shown a fellow student a bullet and told him that he wanted to shoot his teacher and another student (citation from www.handguncontrol.org, August 1999). At the end of February 2000, a first-grade student was fatally shot by her six-year-old classmate at an elementary school near Flint, Michigan. Investigations reported that the two youngsters may have scuffled the previous day.

The violence and killings in these communities horrified the nation and created pockets of fear around the country. This fear exploded with the April 1999 Littleton, Colorado tragedy. Two alienated teenage boys killed 12 students, one teacher and then themselves. Psychological autopsies have tried to determine how teen alienation could have led to so horrific a deed. Conclusions listed no single cause but suggested several factors including gun availability, inadequate supervision, lack of connection to others, poor communication skills, and few or no problem-solving skills (Spitzer 1999). Colombine High School has become synonymous with school violence and the infectious reactions seen in hundreds of schools across the nation is disturbing. Where will it stop? Could these incidents have been prevented?

As one would expect, national attention has been focused on the school shootings – reported endlessly by the media. "Quick-fix" reactions quickly appeared, including police-in-residence in the schools, expulsion of students for real or suspected acts, metal detectors, and hidden video cameras. Attention to prevention – i.e., the school environment – is slowly receiving the attention reserved only for the crime and violence in earlier reports.

To break the cycle of violence we must begin with long-term planning aimed at fostering non-violent school communities. Programmatic prevention efforts such as conflict resolution and school-wide behavior management can help establish a climate free of violence. There is a growing, common-sense consensus that the best way to handle violence in the schools and prevent its spread throughout the community is to defuse disputes before they turn violent. Conflict resolution has been shown to be effective in reducing student aggression in schools, but more importantly, it teaches students to consider and use alternatives to violence in solving conflicts (Bodine, et al. 1995). Dissatisfaction with traditional processes established to settle disputes has led educators and others to try new ways of conflict resolution such as mediation.

The definition of mediation, according to Webster, is to be in the middle – the process of intervention between conflicting parties to promote reconciliation, settlement or compromise (Webster 1985). Mediation as an alternative means of dispute resolution has been around in various forms since the 1960's. Mediation is employed frequently in conflict resolution in the business, professional, and other general population arenas. The mediation process in the school environment focuses on a proactive approach. Communication skills are taught and practiced in an attempt to teach students how to settle everyday conflicts without physical aggression. Associations of community

mediation programs have emerged in a number of states to support the interests, growth, and consolidation of programs (Justice Information Center 1997). More than 400 communities across the country have established community mediation centers (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 1999). Through these centers, mediation has been applied in common conflict situations found in the community, schools, families, and businesses.

Since 1981, Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR) has been involved in the effort. Nationwide, teachers began incorporating dispute resolution lessons into their curricula, but their efforts were unorganized and isolated. ESR organized these independent activities into a national association, addressing the question, "How can students learn alternative ways of dealing with conflict?" Volunteers and professionals quickly came to understand the importance of teaching youngsters conflict resolution skills. And soon community mediation programs began urging local elementary and secondary schools to initiate student conflict resolution programs. By 1984, the growth of these programs prompted fifty United States educators and community mediators to form a support network for themselves and others who would be starting programs. This was the beginning of The National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) whose focus is the implementation of mediation programs in maintaining a positive school climate.

Further expansion of the school mediation concept is described in one of the most widely accepted violence-prevention programs in the educational community: the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) which began in 1985 as a collaboration of the New York City Public Schools and Educators for Social Responsibility (Metis Associates Inc. 1990). The RCCP is significant for several reasons. One, critical

stakeholders are involved — K-12 students, school administrators, staff, parents, and community members. Two, it has been evaluated after a five-year implementation period by an independent group, Metis Associates Inc. This is an unusual step among school-based programs (National Institute of Justice 1994). RCCP, with its comprehensive and inclusive design, is the antithesis of popular "quick-fix" approaches.

The program incorporates the following components:

- professional development for teachers, including a twenty-four hour introductory course and ongoing support for classroom implementation of the RCCP curriculum;
- regular classroom instruction based on K-12 curricula developed by RCCP in close collaboration with participating teachers;
- peer mediation in which carefully selected groups of students are trained in mediation and then serve their schools as peer mediators;
- administrator training to introduce administrators to the concepts and skills of conflict resolution and bias awareness in order to show them how they can use their leadership to achieve effective implementation of the program;
- parent training to help parents develop better ways of dealing with conflict and prejudice at home and become more effective leaders in their children's schools.

Key findings after five years of implementation in the New York City Public Schools, according to Metis, are as follows:

- less physical violence in the classroom, as reported by 64% of the teachers;
- increase in student cooperation, as reported by 75% of the teachers;
- students felt better about themselves (increased self-image), as reported by 92% of the students;

- increase in parents' communication and problem-solving skills, as reported by 90% of the parents;
- decreased antisocial behavior and reduced violence, as reported by 80% of the teachers and administrators;
- improved communication and conflict resolution skills disseminated throughout the student body by modeling behaviors of the student mediators, as reported by the majority of school staff.

Findings from another RCCP school site, this one in Brooklyn's Community School District 15, revealed similar outcomes (Metis Associates Inc. 1996). Data was obtained from surveys of approximately 150 teachers and students, plus 143 student mediators in five schools with mediation programs. There was an average of 107 successful student mediations per school. Fully 89% of the teachers agreed that the mediation program had helped students take more responsibility for solving their own problems. Over 80% of both teachers and students said that students had been helped through their contact with the mediators.

The student mediators benefitted, too. Although peer mediation was not the focus of the RCCP program, 84% of these students agreed that the mediation process helped them to understand people with different views. Many felt it helped them with their own lives. Said one secondary school student:

> "[After being a mediator in my school], I have begun to use the same skills in my own conflicts. I try to think of why the other person is doing what they're doing and what is going on in their head[s]. I try to think of how we could come to a solution. I guess you could say I mediate my own conflicts, and it's working a lot better."

For some students, their involvement has been nothing less than a conversion experience, changing them from school yard bullies to peacemakers.

> "I wish that the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program could be taught in every classroom in America, because we are not going to deal with the violence in our communities, our homes, and our nation until we learn to deal with the basic ethic of how we resolve our disputes and to place an emphasis on peace in the way we relate to one another." (Edelman-Wright, Marion 1996).

A more recent Conflict Resolution study is the Conflict Resolution/Peer Mediation Research Grant Study in the Department of Special Education at the University of Florida. The work, funded through the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, focused on reducing the level of chronic disruptive and aggressive behavior in middle school populations through increased knowledge of conflict resolution skills, including peer mediation. Four schools participated; two were the experimental subjects, two were the control groups. The curriculum and training addressed communication skills and mediation techniques. After four years, the final results were reported in June 1999.

The following summary of findings is noteworthy:

- the issue in 84% of referred conflicts was verbal harassment, 36% gossip and 19% physical aggression;
- In 95% of referred conflicts, disputants reached an agreement, usually consisting of avoiding each other (44%) or stopping the offending behavior (39%);
- disputants reported high levels of satisfaction with the mediation process;
- mediators reported generalization of skills to "informal" conflict situations;
- parents of peer mediators reported mediation as a positive experience for their child and indicated skills were generalized to the home environment;
- at one of the middle schools, the number of student disciplinary incidents declined markedly following early and effective implementation of the CR/PM

program. Incident data for the other two schools showed a less marked but possible trend toward a decline over time following program implementation;

- teachers generally indicated support of the mediation program if they felt sufficiently involved and informed during planning and implementation.

An article written by Ian M. Harris, a University of Milwaukee Professor of Education reports on Peace Education in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Peabody Journal of Education 1996). A K-12 peace study curriculum was mandated in the Milwaukee Public School System as early as 1985 – then emphasizing the threat of nuclear war. In the 1990's the focus turned to reducing violence in schools, homes, and communities. Coping mechanisms were taught so students could peacefully manage conflicts in their lives and focus on their lessons in school. Skills such as communication, critical thinking and decision-making, anger management, problem-solving, respect for others, and responsible citizenship were incorporated in the curriculum. All teachers received training – not all used it. Peer Mediation was initiated, with mediators receiving additional training including negotiation skills, and despite budget cuts in 1995, the School Board and Superintendent preserved efforts to promote peace in the schools.

Though the Milwaukee plan was not a scientifically designed study producing quantitative results, the summary results were instructive. Schools have shown an increase in attendance, grade-point averages, parent involvement and a decrease in suspensions and expulsions. Schools that are peaceful have long waiting lists. One elementary school principal – who saw a 50% drop in the number of problems referred to his office – suggested that all students should go through the peer mediation program because it teaches leadership, communication and conflict resolution.

According to Harris (1996), despite the important gains made by peace education reform in some Milwaukee schools, not all school personnel are embracing these reform efforts. In most schools, teachers and administrators still use punitive measures to punish students distraught by violence who are acting out in classrooms. Many of the professional staff do not believe in the power of peace to address the problems of school failure in an urban area. Troublesome students are suspended and expelled. Many staff believe that punishment provides security, and do not take time out from teaching traditional curricula to teach children about nonviolence and peace. Some teachers do not create spaces in their daily routines for students to talk about the impact of violence on their lives. Others have neither the time nor the inclination to learn new conflict resolution skills so they can teach them to students. Beset by many demands, they have no energy to adopt new reforms, and are growing cynical and bitter when faced with angry, hostile students. As mentioned earlier, despite a board mandate promoting peace education, the majority of teachers in the Milwaukee Public School System are not involved in peace education reform efforts (Harris 1996).

Reflection on ten years of peace educational practices in the Milwaukee Public School System provides some principles for peace education reform. All children can benefit from peace education; violence has a profound emotional impact on young people; peace education has a broader realm than conflict resolutions; all courses can incorporate peace concepts, and all teachers can use a peaceful pedagogy.

A clear picture of a safe and responsive school emerges from the studies discussed. Well functioning schools foster learning, safety, and socially appropriate behaviors. Quick-fix reactions to violence in schools do not seem to work in the long-term. Peace

education programs involving mediation and communication skills are being adopted by more schools nationwide.

PSYCHOSOCIAL BASES AND EFFECTS OF PEER MEDIATION

"SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY"

The social learning theory (Bandura and Walters 1971) provides a conceptional basis for teaching the skills mentioned in the previous studies. Bandura's theory, though promulgated more than twenty years ago, continues to be accepted and quoted in current educational psychology literature. This theory embodies several concepts – modeling, self-efficacy, and cognition. According to Bandura, the most important learning is through observation and instruction. People learn through watching others' behavior, reading books or gathering information from other media, and receiving instructions. Modeling, as defined by Bandura, includes not only simple observation and imitation of one person by another, but also those processes (often called identification) by which a person tries to be the same kind of person as another. Though identification is visible in all ages, it is very apparent in elementary school children. Elementary age children, according to Bandura, invariably compare themselves to their peers. Comparison with subsequent copying to foster a sense of belonging is an integral part of a child's development, as studied by child development professionals (Leach 1994).

The child's self-esteem is essentially his self-judgement of his own abilities, influence, and popularity (Ambron-Robinson 1975). In comparing children of high and low self-esteem (Coopersmith 1967), it was found that children of high esteem asserted themselves even at the risk of disapproval, showed initiative, were confident of their own judgements and capabilities, and took leadership roles. On the other hand, low self-

esteem children withdrew in their fear of disapproval, did not participate in groups, were filled with self-doubts about their own judgements and capabilities, and would give up easily in tasks and problem-solving, frustrated in the attempt. A widely held theory about aggression suggests that it is a response to frustration (blocking of goal-directed behavior) (Dollard, et. al. 1939). Ambron agrees – this aggression, she says, is the expression of the child's anger in the face of frustration, and is one of the most noted behavior problems in the classroom. A frustrated child who has not learned the social skills of communication involving listening, persuasion, negotiating, and the heart of human interaction – empathy and respect – often displaces his aggression, directing it against other objects or persons, often in a violent manner (Ambron 1975).

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is like self-esteem, but it is specific to situations. Self-efficacy is a person's self-perception of competence to enact a behavior. Seligman (1987) defines it as the belief that one has mastery over the events of one's life and can meet challenges as they come up. Bandura (1986) suggests that a perception of low self-efficacy is associated with a number of negative consequences. It leads to avoidance; people are likely to avoid situations where they feel incompetent. Defensive behavior may also be a response to perceived low self-efficacy. One acts defensively when one believes one cannot handle something. People who have a sense of self-efficacy bounce back from failures: they approach things in terms of how to handle them rather than worrying about what can go wrong. In essence, then, defensiveness is the converse of a feeling of mastery. Therefore, children need to learn skills to deal with their frustration and anger, and skills to increase their self-perception of competence (self-efficacy), leading to pro-active behavior in challenging situations instead of defensive responses. This is one of the goals of a peer mediation program.

Bandura and Walters (1986) emphasized the importance of teaching children alternative modes of behavior as a means of reducing the frequency of aggressive action. Their work suggests that there are modes of feeling and action that are incompatible with aggression. It is difficult to feel both sympathy and hatred toward a person at the same time. It is also difficult to engage in helpful, supportive behavior toward another and simultaneously show hostility. Slaby (1974) notes that not only the development of empathetic reactions but also the development of altruistic, or unselfish behavior, serve to reduce the likelihood that a child will behave aggressively. Even so simple a procedure as teaching children to say helpful words like *nice, kind,* and *help*, – rather than aggressive words – like *mean, hurt,* and *hate* may help the child to choose alternative forms of action rather than aggression.

As stated earlier, Bandura (1986) asserts that all learning is cognitively mediated. Thus, modeling and self-efficacy would be strengthened by the cognitive processes of teaching communication and problem-solving skills in a peer mediation program. The increased self-confidence and "feeling better about themselves" (RCCP-New York City & Brooklyn 1990) demonstrates an increased sense of self-efficacy.

Related to the idea of self-efficacy is the idea that behavior problems may be based on a lack of skills to handle troublesome situations (Bandura & Adams 1977). Dysfunctional behavior, such as the use of alcohol and drugs, or aggression – violent or non-violent – may result. Consequently, many social learning theorists have been interested in social skills training. Bandura argues that raising the level of perception of self-efficacy is the most potent personal change event. He also states that verbal persuasion alone may not be the best way to do this – "performance-based" interventions are more effective than verbal ones. This suggests the effectiveness of role-playing –

using communication skills – in a peer mediation program. An ongoing program offers students the opportunity to practice these and other skills with each other, reinforcing their importance.

Contemporary psychologists expand the concept of social skills training (Goleman 1995). Developing competencies in interpersonal relationships strengthens the sense of self-efficacy, making a person more willing to take risks and seek out more demanding challenges as they come up. And surmounting those challenges in turn further increases the sense of self-efficacy. This attitude makes people more likely to make the best use of whatever skills they may have – or do what it takes to develop them. Michael Gurian, author, psychologist and educator who has worked extensively with families, school districts, and criminal justice agencies, writes,

> "Punitive strategies miss the deeper message boys are giving us by their violent and criminal behavior. They are acting out against schools, parents and society, because none are providing them with enough modeling, opportunity and wisdom through which to act comfortably within society and feel, in that social inclusion, empowered" (Gurian, Michael 1996).

BASES FOR THE USE OF PEERS AS MEDIATORS

The question arises – why use peers in the mediation process? Furthermore, why focus on the elementary school? Peers (similar age/grade) seem to be the appropriate recruits for the mediation learning experience for several reasons. The young find models among their own age-mates, according to Margaret Mead (Mead 1970) who theorizes that members of each generation learn values and ways of behaving from their peers.

Dr. Penelope Leach, psychologist and child development specialist, writes that all human beings tackle moral dilemmas, real or simulated, most effectively in discussion and argument with people they perceive as equals (Leach 1994). Western schools, she notes, are often expected to replace the interlocked social groups, villages, clans or tribes

of the past. In the post-industrial West, for many children, non-family peers are almost exclusively their classmates. Schools are never *only* for academic learning, of course, because the groups into which children are gathered are important in themselves. Many aspects of development depend on the mutual aid of peer interaction – pleasant and unpleasant – and the eventual formation of a fresh older generation to be responsible for society depends on children and young people growing up through shared experiences.

Many studies have been made of the ways in which peer groups influence their members and of the ways in which their members are prone to influence. One classic study (Berenda 1950), which measured the extent to which children of different ages conform to false judgements when pressure is exerted on them by peers, found that they conformed most often when the pressure is exerted by peers whom they believe to be very competent. The period of greatest conformity was found to be between the ages of seven and ten years. This finding is supported by Piaget (1950) who maintains that in middle childhood the individual becomes much better at grasping rules and taking the role of the other. She can step outside of her own limited viewpoint, see many aspects of a situation, including the views of others, and try out various solutions to a problem. The results of a respected study (Johnson, et al. 1992), indicated that after peer mediation training, the student-student conflicts were usually managed by the students themselves without the involvement of adults. Peer mediation gives students an opportunity to resolve their disputes themselves, in mutually satisfactory ways without having to engage the attention of a teacher. This empowers the students who sometimes feel like they are victims of the "arbitrary" whims of the teacher. Because the solutions are their own, the overwhelming number of resolutions "hold" and the mediators' self-esteem improves as they perform a valuable service for themselves, their classmates and the school. A

logistical aspect to this situation would also seem significant – the number of students in our schools far exceeds the number of teachers available to be involved in this important process.

According to the American Bar Association, (National Institute of Justice 1997, Section of Dispute Resolution) more than 4,000 schools now offer conflict resolution skills training to students or have internal dispute resolution programs, or both. The ABA credits the Conflict Resolution Education Network of the National Institute on Dispute Resolution (formerly the National Association for Mediation in Education – NAME) as a leader in promoting school-based conflict resolution programs. NAME looked at the impact of conflict resolution programs on schools in six sites, two of which were elementary-based: Colorado Springs, Colorado and Chatam County, North Carolina (Lam 1988).

From the Colorado and North Carolina elementary school studies, the following qualitative data was reported:

- 80% of the teachers indicated that students now solved problems with peers instead of relying on adults;
- approximately 75% of the teachers felt that problems were solved peacefully and there was an increased respect for and cooperation with others;
- teachers also reported that increased positive self-image in students was a successful outcome of the program;
- teachers and administrators reported decreased antisocial behavior and reduced violence.

Teacher reports, observations of student behavior, and student surveys "unequivocally" indicate that students felt better about themselves, behaved with greater self-assurance, and developed a more positive self-image as a result of participation in this program.

A practicum/intervention study conducted in a Florida elementary school – population 480 students (Satchel 1992) – addressed three objectives:

1) reduce student discipline referrals for antisocial behavior for students in kindergarten through sixth grade;
2) increase student conflict resolution skills;
3) increase the pro-social behavior of students.

After one year of conflict resolution training, the results of the study indicated a decrease in the number of antisocial behaviors exhibited by students.

Behavior	**Pre-intervention**	**Post-intervention**
Disciplined referrals for antisocial behavior	479	219
Fighting	90	73
Habitual Tardies	148	0
Disrespectful	25	12
Abusive Behavior	22	11

According to Satchel (1992), the implementation of a mediated dispute resolution program where students were used as conflict mediators contributed positively to peer interaction, personal responsibility, and school climate.

As noted above, the ABA has been instrumental in the establishment of conflict resolution in schools across the country. A series of three articles written by educators describes initiatives of the ABA that bring the skills of mediation to the classroom

(Miller, et al. 1994). All three professionals agreed that peer mediation programs were the most beneficial programs in addressing the conflict resolution process. By reducing the number of disputes, and increasing cooperation and respect, peer mediation helps to create and maintain a more peaceable school climate. These educators realize that the programs are teaching life skills which will serve all the students all their lives (Miller 1994).

Implementation of a peer mediation program may help school leaders to create a climate of calm in a world that, for so many children, is chaotic. Too many of our young people are caught up in conflicts every day that they do not know how to manage: teasing, threatening, name-calling, jealousy and physical aggression (Miller 1994). In her study Miller also noted that children are becoming involved in violence at younger ages, that drug and alcohol abuse is a wide-spread problem, that weapons are more likely to be used in school fights, that membership in gangs is increasing, and that trivial matters are increasingly resulting in violence. The literature reveals that prior to the introduction of peer mediation training, elementary school students seemed conditioned to look to the teacher for a solution to their conflicts (teasing, playground disputes, and so on); they did not have the procedures and interpersonal skills necessary to manage conflicts constructively (Johnson, et al. 1992). As shown in the multiple RCCP evaluations, violent responses to conflict may be replaced (relearned) with communication skills, creative problem-solving techniques, and better decision-making skills – when given the opportunity to learn them.

School provides an important environment for overall developmental success of children. Samples & Aber (1998) noted that school contextual factors influence development in the elementary grades. They named interpersonal relations with peers and

classmates, teachers' perceptions of children's aggression, and the probability of exposure to antisocial youth as possible influences.

The school milieu can be "contaminated" by the attitudes, expectations, and behaviors that students and teachers may bring into the school from outside societal settings. Consistent with the findings reported in the social learning theory literature (Bandura and Walters 1986), exposure to antisocial atmospheres, real or perceived, can be psychologically toxic to the students, resulting in aggressive or violent behavior described in the preceding paragraphs – as well as affecting learning and teaching, the primary mission of our schools.

> According to William DeJong, a lecturer at the Harvard School of Public Health,
>
> "The best school-based violence prevention programs seek to do more than reach the individual child. They instead try to change the total school environment, to create a safe community that lives by a credo of non-violence and multicultural appreciation." (DeJong, Spring, 1994. Forum 25:8).

School mediation programs are best implemented as part of a larger effort to train staff and students in conflict resolution. Schools must not only help students to become literate and well informed; they must also help them to develop the capacity to live responsibly in our democratic society. The literature points to the most effective programs being ones that are comprehensive and involve multiple components such as problem-solving processes and principles of conflict resolution, the basics of communication (especially listening), critical and creative thinking, and an emphasis on personal responsibility and self-discipline.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The focus of the study was the development, implementation and evaluation of a pilot peer mediation program with fourth grade students in a small, rural elementary

school. The model for the study was the program, Peers in Education Addressing Conflict Effectively (PEACE), whose goal is to reduce the level of violence in Wisconsin elementary schools by teaching children how to resolve their conflicts peacefully. Peer mediators were taught conflict resolution skills, and attitudes and behaviors were assessed at the end of the pilot program.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a program in peer mediation piloted in a fourth grade classroom would encourage students to use learned conflict resolution skills to resolve disputes peacefully, thus reducing antisocial and violent behavior in the school environment.

Respondents

Three fourth grade classes from Black Earth Elementary School in the Wisconsin Heights School District were involved in a pilot program in conflict resolution using the Peers in Education Addressing Conflict Effectively (PEACE) model. Black Earth School is one of two elementary schools in the Wisconsin Heights School District. Black Earth, Wisconsin is 12 miles west of Madison. The second elementary school is four miles west of Black Earth in the Village of Mazomanie.These two elementary schools, with a current population of 272 and 295 respectively, feed students into the district middle and high school building located midway between the two villages.

Black Earth Elementary School, the pilot program site, serves students in early childhood through the fifth grade. The fourth grade in this study numbered 62 students – 16 girls and 46 boys, with an average age of ten years. This population was chosen for the following reasons: teacher and staff judgement, developmental

guidance lessons already scheduled, age appropriateness, developmentally ready to learn the necessary concepts and skills, persistent occurrences of disputes and antisocial behavior, and accessibility to fifth grade follow-up and program continuation.

Procedure

Peers in Education Addressing Conflict Effectively (PEACE) is a statewide program sponsored by the Office of the Wisconsin Attorney General and The State Bar of Wisconsin. The program offers an alternative conflict resolution approach in which mediators are taught appropriate skills to assist their peers in resolving disputes peacefully, helping to establish a non-threatening environment conducive to learning. These two organizations have jointly sponsored an annual PEACE program training since 1995. In an effort to recruit additional schools to join the program, a survey is conducted to locate schools in the state that do not currently have a peer mediation program in place. Since neither elementary school in the Wisconsin Heights School District had an existing peer mediation program, the District applied and was included in the PEACE effort.

In late August 1998, the elementary guidance counselor, the two elementary principals, two teachers and the Family Resource Coordinator attended a training program taught by professionals in the PEACE Program. During the two day training sessions, participants learned how to train students to mediate disputes. The training provided lessons on conflict resolution to teach participants to think critically, listen to both sides of a story impartially, and arrive at creative and acceptable solutions.

Participants were given curriculum information and materials to take back to their schools (Appendix H).

Operational Process

The administration made the decision to pilot the PEACE peer mediation program in one grade in one elementary school. After the fall semester began in 1998, the fourth grade class at Black Earth Elementary School was selected to participate.

The concepts of peer mediation and conflict resolution were introduced to the Black Earth school staff through a role-played demonstration at a staff meeting in mid-October 1998. An informational letter describing the PEACE program was sent to all parents of fourth graders. One of the author's responsibilities as the elementary guidance counselor was to teach 18 half-hour lessons in developmental guidance to all students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The fourth graders received four lessons introducing them to conflict resolution and the process of peer mediation. The students were told that the pilot program would involve only the three fourth grade classrooms in their school.

After the students were introduced to the PEACE program and process, the next step was for them to choose their class peer mediators. The students were reminded of the training commitment, which would include time after school and a Saturday morning. They were also informed of the ongoing program evaluation which would continue into their fifth grade year. Parental permission was required for any student selected to become a mediator. Each student then completed a nomination form (Appendix A). The names were processed by the author and the three fourth grade teachers. Sixteen students, eight girls and eight boys, were nominated to be trained as the fourth grade peer mediators. Students were then informed of their nominations and given the choice to

accept or decline the position. One boy chose not to participate. Permission forms were then sent to the parents of the selected fifteen students. All fifteen students were granted parental permission to participate in the PEACE program.

The PEACE program suggests between 12 and 20 hours of training for student mediators. The training began when the students returned from winter break in January 1999. The author and another adult who had attended the PEACE training in August 1998 scheduled a series of training sessions for a total of twelve hours. The mediators were taught the concepts and skills of conflict resolution as guided by the PEACE curriculum. The skills included such communication practices as: active listening, reflection of feelings, empathy, paraphrasing, brainstorming, and decision-making. These and other skills were practiced through role-playing with each other and the author. Each mediator was given a copy of the steps to follow in a mediation session to use as needed (Appendix B). Practice outside of school was encouraged.

The fifteen mediators were placed in seven teams of two (one team of three), rotating weekly to mediate the reported conflicts in their fourth grade population. These conflicts were identified by any of the fourth grade students. Students who were having a dispute were encouraged by staff and other students to sign up for mediation. If they agreed to do so, the two disputants filled out a brief form (Appendix C) located in each classroom, and deposited it in the Mediation Box provided. The box was checked each day by one of the mediators. Hearings were held on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings between 8:00 and 9:00 in the family resource room. Each of the three trained adults (the author, principal, and family resource coordinator) were assigned a day to supervise the mediation process. If a settlement was reached, the original mediation request form was signed by all four participants and kept on file. If a settlement was not reached, there

were no signatures of resolution; the form was filed and the involved parties were encouraged to keep communicating with each other and to return to the mediation table as they wished. The mediation referral forms were kept on file with the principal for use as part of the program evaluation.

Time Frame

Mediation hearings began in March 1999.The fourth grade classrooms had three months of school left to use the peer mediation process to solve their conflicts and disputes peacefully.

Since the actual mediation component of the pilot program began late in the second semester (1999), the author recommended that the program continue through the first semester of the 1999/2000 school year. The administration and teachers agreed and the mediators were informed that their peer mediation role would continue into the next school year. None of them objected. There was a change in staffing which included the loss of one fourth grade teacher (1999/2000) and the addition of a new fifth grade teacher.

Evaluation Instruments

A questionnaire was administered to the peer mediators to measure their attitudes, conflict resolution skills understanding, and self-confidence during the first three months of the peer mediation pilot program (Appendix D). Survey questions dealt with the understanding and use of the skills taught to the students. It addressed the initial results of the program as observed by these fifteen students in the school environment – i.e., more students solving their own problems, less teacher intervention, reduction in violent behaviors, and any change in the overall climate of the school. In addition to the written response, important anecdotal information was spontaneously reported by the students.

The number and nature of mediated disputes was collected and filed. The number of physical fights between students (fourth grade) after the implementation of the PEACE program was recorded. Data from the office records concerning suspensions (in school and out), bus reports (fighting), and parent phone calls for threatening behavior was collected and compared.

The three fourth grade teachers and also fifth grade teachers were surveyed to gather data on their intervention of student conflicts, hallway "playfighting", recess-duty observations and overall classroom climate (Appendix E). The fourth grade student population (now fifth grade) was surveyed using a brief questionnaire (Appendix F) asking such things as how often they used the program, how satisfied they were with the session, school climate rating (after PEACE program implementation), and any changes they would suggest for the program. The fifteen peer mediators, now fifth graders, were given a final questionnaire directed at their involvement in the program (Appendix G). Finally, the school principal was interviewed to find out her feelings and recommendations for the PEACE program.

Results of the data analysis, both written and anecdotal, are reported in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a program in peer mediation piloted in a fourth grade class would encourage students to use learned conflict resolution skills to resolve disputes peacefully, thus reducing antisocial and violent behavior in the school environment. The results evaluating the effectiveness of a peer mediation pilot program conducted in the fourth grade population of the Black Earth Elementary School are presented in this chapter. The time frame of the pilot program included two school semesters: January-May 1999 and September 1999-January 2000. Two questionnaires were given to the 15 peer mediators; one questionnaire was given to all fourth grade students, and the teachers also completed a questionnaire. In addition to the written questionnaires, qualitative data was gathered through the author's informal interviews with the peer mediators. Helpful anecdotal information was spontaneously given by the teachers and principal throughout the program, as well as in informal discussion sessions.

Table 1 shows the peer mediators' use of the conflict resolution skills learned early in the first semester. All 15 mediators reported following the step-by-step process of mediation as outlined and practiced in their training (Appendix B). All but two of the mediators reported using each of the following skills: reflection of feelings (you talked about the disputant's feelings), appropriate questions (you

asked questions if you did not understand something), not giving advice (you did not tell anyone what they should do), non-judgmental listening (you listened to each person and did not take sides), and summarizing the conflict objectively (restating the problem in your own words).

Question 2 on the questionnaire reads, "Did you use any or all of these skills (above) outside of peer mediation?" (Appendix D). The responses varied as shown in Table 5. Three of the mediators answered "no". The remaining twelve mediators each described an occasion outside of the formal mediation session where they used the mediation skills. Two of the mediators described intervening in a sibling dispute at home; another averted a fight with a cousin by talking things out; and four of the mediators used listening skills and talked about feelings with friends. Since becoming a mediator, one of the students wrote that his listening skills improved. Communication skills were used by a student settling a problem at football practice and by a student straightening out a seating problem on the school bus. One of the students wrote that his listening skills got better; he said now he "hears" what is being said. And one mediator answered the question simply by writing, "I learned empathy".

As indicated in Table 2, 90-95% of the mediators thought there was more student problem solving with less teacher help and noticed less violent behavior at school. This percentage also reported feeling better about themselves, including having better leadership skills since mediator training. Four of the group did not think school was a nicer place to learn, although eleven of them did. It is significant to note that this data was collected during the early stages of the program.

One third of the mediators reported they would not change the program. Of those who wanted changes, 25% suggested more training, 20% suggested modifying the program structure and increasing the advertising (Table 6). As also indicated in Table 6, one third of the mediators said they liked the training sessions.

Anecdotal observations given to the author in informal discussions with the fourth grade teachers suggested both support and questionable merit of the program. A report was given about some students who were not willing to deal with fighting issues with adults but were willing to take their problem to peer mediation. One veteran teacher observed that playground duty had become more enjoyable since mediation began, describing students who were not trained mediators "helping" others work out common squabbles during recess. Another teacher expressed difficulty staying "out of" her students' day-to-day problems such as teasing, name-calling , and tattling. The participating teachers agreed that they lacked information on the program and wished for more consistent involvement of the PEACE trained staff (three adults).

Evaluations continued during the final semester of the pilot program. Questionnaires were administered to all members of the fourth grade class (now fifth graders) (Appendix F). There were now 59 total instead of 62 students as reported in the beginning of the pilot program. Table 3 reflects the responses of these students. Fifty-eight of the students were aware of the Peer Mediation Program in their grade; one student said he did not know about it. One third (19) of fourth graders reported using peer mediation. Of these 19 students, 14 stated they resolved their conflict successfully; five reached no resolution. Fifty-five percent of the referred conflicts involved friendship issues. Rumors and gossip accounted for 30% of conflicts, and playground disputes, 15%.

The remaining 40 students who chose not to use peer mediation gave the following reasons for their choice: three students did not want anyone to know they were going to peer mediation, 17 students solved the conflict without help, ten asked a teacher for help, and seven "didn't have any problems".

As Table 3 indicates, 81% of the now fifth grade students did not think there were less fights in school. Eighty-five percent did not think there was less teasing, rumors or gossip since the implementation of the program. However, 26 students (45%) indicated they would like to be peer mediators.

Fifty-four percent of the pilot study students offered no suggestions, feelings or comments on the peer mediation program. Of the 46% (27 students) who did respond, 41% (11 students) gave negative comments. Examples include:

- "I don't think peer mediation helps a bit. It stinks."
- "I don't think you get anywhere and a lot of the mediators were chosen because they are supposedly cool and a lot of those people are complete jerks."
- "I don't think it helps because it makes you get angrier and sad."

Thirty percent (eight students) felt peer mediation was a good program. Typical responses from these students include:

- "Peer mediation is a good problem helper for children."
- "It is pretty cool; you get to solve problems."

Fifteen percent (four students) thought teachers should initiate referrals.

- "I think teachers should tell kids to go to peer mediation."

Thirteen percent (three students) suggested changing the program structure. Comments reflecting this are:

- "Don't have mediation at recess."

- "I think groups of kids should go to the sessions."
- "More training for the mediators would help."

In addition to the general student questionnaire, the peer mediators answered a questionnaire focusing on their involvement in the program. Table 4 reflects their responses. Seventy-three percent of the mediators noted no significant changes in kids solving their problems; eighty percent did not think the school was becoming a safer environment. As Table 4 indicates, 14 mediators (93%) showed some understanding of problem solving; 47% of them said they were better listeners; and 87% of them would like to be peer mediators next year.

Five teachers shared their reactions to the program in a written survey (Appendix E) in March 2000, and also during informal conversations with the author throughout the pilot program. They were consistent in responding that they noticed no significant change in physical conflicts or in their interventions in student disputes. One of the teachers thought the students were becoming more considerate of others. One noticed more students pleasantly greeting each other in the morning and being more helpful in the classroom. However, all the teachers reported that the program was not adequately explained to the adults or students by the three adults trained in the PEACE program.

Data collected from the principal's office showed no changes in the student expulsion rate during the pilot study term and the previous school year. The number of in-school suspensions in the year preceding the program was two; during the pilot program there was one suspension. Bus reports indicated a slight decrease in physical altercations during the pilot program term, (four compared to six in the previous year.) Parent phone calls for threatening behavior by students was not clearly documented.

The school principal supported the concept of the PEACE Program, but described a lack of total school involvement, minimal demonstration of staff participation and inadequate supportive publicity. The principal attributed this deficiency to the time constraints and academic priorities of the participating teachers, and the many responsibilities of the three PEACE trained adults. It was suggested by this administrator that the training be more comprehensive and include continual reinforcement with teachers and students.

Table 1

Measurement of Mediators' Use of Conflict Resolution Skills*

	Used	Did Not Use
Followed the mediation steps	15	
Reflection of feelings	14	1
Appropriate questions	15	
Not giving advice	15	
Non-judgmental listening	13	2
Summarizing the conflict objectively	14	1

* Trained Mediators: 15 students

September 1999

Table 2

Number of Mediators Indicating Change in School Climate

	Yes	No
Less violent behavior happening at school	13	2
More problem-solving; agreements reached	13	2
Less teacher help in solving conflicts	13	2
Better leadership skills in yourself	15	0
Feel better about yourself	14	1
School is a nicer place to learn	11	4

September 1999

Table 3

Student Questionnaire on Peer Mediation Program*

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you know about the Peer Mediation Program?	58	1	
Have you used Peer Mediation in school?	19	40	
Did you solve the problem?	**14**	**5**	
Do you think Peer Mediation helped to make the school safer?	10	25	24
Do you think there are less fights in the school since Peer Mediation?	15	32	12
Do you think there is less teasing since Peer Mediation?	8	38	13
Do you think there is less spreading of rumors and gossip since Peer Mediation?	10	39	10
Would you like to be a Peer Mediator?	26	30	3

* 59 Fifth Grade Students; 44 Boys, 15 Girls

March 2000

Table 4

Peer Mediator Final Questionnaire*

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Peer Mediation helped kids solve problem?	4	2	9
Sometimes there is more than one way to solve a problem?	14	0	1
Peer Mediation has helped me become a better listener?	7	1	7
Do you think Peer Mediation helped make school a safer place?	3	6	6
I liked being a Peer Mediator.	9	0	6
Would you like to be a Peer Mediator next year?	13	2	

* 15 Peer Mediators; 7 Boys, 8 Girls

March 2000

Table 5

Peer Mediators' Use of Mediation Skills Outside of School*
(Question #2, Appendix D)

	Yes	No
Did you use the skills outside of the school?	13	2
Within the family?	4	
Outside the family?	9	
Specific skills used		
Listening	3	
Reflection of feelings	2	
Talking it out	8	

*Peer Mediators 15

September 1999

Table 6

Responses of Peer Mediators to Changes in the Pilot Program*
(Question #5, Appendix D)

What changes would you make?	
More advertising	20%
More training	28%
Modify the program structure	20%
No changes	33 1/3%
What did you like about the program?	
Training sessions	33 1/3%
Stronger friendships	13%
Better school environment	13%

*Peer Mediators 15

September 1999

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"The most effective school responses to violence are those that develop individual social resources of their students."
(Laub and Lauritsen, 1998)

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a program in peer mediation piloted in a fourth grade class would encourage students to use learned conflict resolution skills to resolve disputes peacefully, thus reducing antisocial and violent behavior in the school environment. Through peer mediation training, students were to learn to talk and listen to each other, make decisions about solving their problems and resolve their disputes peacefully. This is the goal of the Peers In Education Addressing Conflict Effectively (PEACE) program, the model used in this study.

The author's findings in this study did not strongly support the hypothesis that peer mediation reduced violence in the school. As reported in Chapter 4, the pilot program produced mixed responses from the students and participating teachers. The early findings, as shown in Table 1, indicated that the mediators had learned the conflict resolution skills. Eighty-seven percent of the mediators also reported less violence at school, more student problem-solving, with less teacher involvement, as shown in Table 2. However, contradictory results were reported by the mediators and the other students in the final survey (Tables 3 and 4). A

possible explanation for these early positive results may be the "Hawthorne Effect" – a stated improvement resulting from mere awareness that experimental attempts are being made to bring about improvement. The newly acquired "status" and attention [training] of the mediators may have prompted them to give the "right answers" in the early questionnaire.

Later findings indicated that though the cognitive skills may have been learned by the mediators, opportunities to use them in mediation sessions were limited. Although all of the pilot program students said they knew about peer mediation (59), only 32% used it, (Table 3), lending to the mediators' frustrations with minimal referrals for mediation. In the final evaluation surveys, (Tables 3 and 4) significant percentages of both mediators and their classmates (80-85%) did not believe there were less fights, less teasing, or that the school was a safer place since the program implementation. The teachers' and students' responses suggested insufficient information about the PEACE program and a lack of consistent attention and supervision. This may be partially explained by the fact that none of the adults (Family Resource Coordinator, Principal, and the Elementary Counselor [the author])who had attended the PEACE training sessions, were in the school building all day or every day. Both the Family Resource Coordinator's and the Counselor's responsibilities include two diverse elementary school populations. During the two day training workshop, these adults learned the conflict resolution skills and mediation steps which would then be taught to the school staff and students. The five teachers in this pilot program did not participate in this workshop. As presented in the literature in Chapter 2, a strong component of successful peer mediation programs is

consistent involvement of trained staff and administration ... a perceived weakness in the pilot program. More ongoing informational sessions and regular updates on the status of the program for the teachers may have increased their sense of ownership and subsequent involvement. With more acceptance and encouragement of the program by the teachers and staff, perhaps more mediation between students would have been initiated.

Another consideration is the continuity and scheduling of the PEACE program. Significant lapses of time and delays between training sessions and implementations occurred as shown in the pilot dates:

August 1998	Three adults trained.
November 1998	All school staff informed.
November – December 1998	Fourth graders introduced to the program.
Mid-December 1998	Peer mediator selection began.
January 1999	Peer mediator training began.
March 1999	PEACE peer mediation sessions began.
May – September 1999	Summer break.
September 1999 - January 2000	Final semester of program.

The dynamics of the program may have been compromised by these lapses in time, especially the summer break. Relationships between students and their selection of peer mediators may have been affected; teams of mediators broke up; the grade level of the pilot population increased; and teacher priorities shifted and changed. Minimal retraining was offered to either adults or students upon return to school in the fall.

The evaluation design may have been improved by including a tool specifically designed for measuring attitudinal changes, as well as a tool measuring observable behavior changes. Random student observations (playground, lunch room, etc.)

performed more regularly may have demonstrated additional evidence of learned – or lack of learned – conflict resolution skills. A control group would lend validity and reliability to the study.

Not all of the study results were negative. As Chapter 4 shows, 93% of the peer mediators indicated increased understanding of problem solving and 47% said they were better listeners. One student shared that he now "hears" what is being said. More than half of the mediators liked being a mediator and 87% indicated they would like to be mediators the following year.

Those students who did refer their conflict to mediation believed they resolved the problem successfully. As Table 3 indicates, 74% of the mediated conflicts were resolved through the mediation process.

Anecdotal observations described a modeling effect (Bandura 1971). Teachers observed students who were not trained as mediators settling disputes on the playground. Other teachers noticed cooperative behaviors in the classroom such as helping each other with homework and forfeiting recess to participate in mediation. The author noted an overall student interest in the origin of conflict resolution, including curiosity about wars in general and school violence in particular (in classroom guidance lessons). Almost half of the pilot study population (45%) was interested in becoming trained peer mediators. As one of the fourth grade students thoughtfully expressed, "There can't be world peace until there's one to one peace in our school."

The pilot study teachers each indicated that they thought that peer mediation was a good program and they wanted it to continue. A number of other staff members (8-10) showed interest in learning more about the program and incorporating some of the principles into their classrooms.

The administration plans to continue the peer mediation program in the upcoming school year. The principal of the second elementary school intends to implement peer mediation by the winter semester of 2001.

In summary, the following conclusions can be made from the results of the pilot study. Although the study did not show in a quantitative way that the peer mediation program resulted in less violence, written results and anecdotal observations offer some tentative suppositions. Conflicts among students do occur in and out of the classroom. Students can be taught skills to manage these conflicts peacefully; however, time and opportunities to use and practice the learned skills in their daily interactions are paramount to affecting behavior change and subsequent reduced hostility in the school setting. It is an incremental process. As stated by N.A.M.E. (1995), "Conflict resolution programs should not be expected to provide a quick fix; solid results take time to develop." When we tell students not to fight without giving them the opportunity to learn and choose an alternative to settle their disputes, they continue to fight. Peer mediation programs may become one of those alternatives for schools to use, especially if the weaknesses of the present study are corrected and the recommendations followed.

Recommendations

Suggested modifications of the PEACE pilot program and recommendations for future studies include the following:

1. Longer term for program implementation. A minimum of two years would provide more meaningful data. The studies discussed in the literature review were at least three years in length.

2. Comprehensive and continuing training sessions of peer mediators throughout the program. This would provide reinforcement of learned skills, learning from each other, and reviewing and refining skills and procedures.
3. Increased marketing. This would give a wider exposure of the peer mediation program throughout the school to involve more students and staff. Examples: announcements, posters, T-shirts, logos, school assembly, etc.
4. Scheduling. Planned peer mediation sessions were held at recess time. Some students would not participate because of this; other options need to be explored.
5. Teacher-staff involvement. Teacher training in conflict resolution skills may help integrate the PEACE principles into the daily curriculum.
6. Parent involvement. The PEACE program suggested parent training, but the administration chose not to include them.
7. Improved evaluation design. A planned design to be in place when program is implemented. More attention given to random student observations, office records (attendance, discipline, suspensions, expulsions) and more frequent teacher reports. A control group would be a good idea.
8. Coordinator time. Someone appointed to oversee and nurture the program consistently. Release time allowed if feasible.
9. Discipline policy. It would be well if the district could embrace the peer mediation approach as part of the disciplinary (often punishment) program.
10. Age involvement. Fourth graders worked well in this study; however, if started younger, attitudes and desired behavioral changes may be learned and instilled earlier, carrying over into the succeeding grades.

11. Peer mediators. To reduce the "popularity contest" during selection, criteria and more teacher input may produce a better cross-section of the population.
12. PEACE Program study. A longitudinal study of the PEACE program in the 40 plus schools in the State of Wisconsin would provide a broader evaluation of the program model, leading to improvements in the program as deficiencies are identified.
13. Acceptance of the concept of peer mediation. The literature review and research discussed in this paper lend credible support to using peer mediation as one part of a total school violence prevention program.

Through listening, feeling, thinking and talking within a safe setting, the author believes that children can develop their individual human potential for dealing appropriately with everyday conflicts. Deliberate reflection, choice and positive action can become intrinsic to their characters. The underlying motivation for conducting this study was the promotion of such student growth and the development of safer educational environments.

> "As a society we have not bothered to make sure every child is taught the essentials of handling anger or resolving conflicts positively – nor have we bothered to teach empathy, impulse control, or any of the other fundamentals of emotional competence." (Goleman)

Shouldn't these essential skills be taught to every child? — And if not now, when?

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APPENDIX A
BLACK EARTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
P.E.A.C.E. PILOT PROGRAM
PEER MEDIATOR SELECTION
December 1998

Please write down the names of three of your classmates who you think will be a good peer mediator. Remember to include at least one person of the opposite sex. You may include yourself as a nominee. Your choices will be kept confidential.

_____ (name 1)

_____ (name 2)

_____ (name 3)

Thank you for your help.

APPENDIX B

PEER MEDIATION PROCESS SHEET

1. **Hello**, my name is _____ and my name is
(Mediator)
_____.
(2nd Mediator)

   Your names are _____ and
(Disputant #1)
_____. We're here to listen to your problem.
(Disputant #2)

2. **"First we need to agree on some ground rules."**
   "Do you agree to solve the problem?"
   "Do you agree not to call names or fight with each other?"
   " Do you agree to listen and not interrupt?"
   " And do you agree to tell the truth?"

3. "We want you to know that everything said here stays here. If anything comes up about drugs, including alcohol, weapons, or touching of private parts, we will have to stop mediation and tell an adult."

4. "Please tell us what happened _____."
(Disputant's name)

MEDIATOR CAN NOW PARAPHRASE AND INCLUDE THE FEELINGS IF THERE ARE ANY!

"_____, **please** tell us what happened."
(Other disputant)

MEDIATOR CAN NOW PARAPHRASE THIS DISPUTANT'S VIEW AND INCLUDE THE FEELINGS!

5. "Is there anything you want to add _____?"
(Disputant #1)
ASK BOTH DISPUTANTS!!

6. _____, can you come up with some ideas to
(Disputant #1)
solve the problem? Each of you come up with as many solutions (ideas) as you can. ASK EACH DISPUTANT.

7. "Okay, which ideas do you think will work? ASK EACH DISPUTANT.

8. "Is this solution **fair**? ASK EACH DISPUTANT.
9. _____, what will you **do** to make this agreement
(Disputant #1)
work?" ASK EACH DISPUTANT.

10. "Congratulations, you've listen to each other and worked to solve your problem. You may choose to tell others you've solved your disagreement."

    "Thank you both for agreeing to come to mediation."

11. Lastly, the parties **sign** the agreement and file it with the supervisor.

APPENDIX C

PEER MEDIATION REFERRAL

P.E.A.C.E.
BLACK EARTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S
PEER MEDIATION REFERRAL

Your name: _____ Date: _____

I am having a conflict with: _____

_____

The problem was: _____

The agreement was: _____

_____

Sign: _____ _____
(disputant) (disputant)

_____ _____
(mediator) (observer)

APPENDIX D
PEER MEDIATOR QUESTIONNAIRE
September 1999

1. Please **check** the skills **you** used during peer mediation.

   _____ **Followed the mediation steps** (as outlined in your script.)

   _____ **Reflection of feelings** (You talked about the disputants' feelings.)

   _____ **Appropriate questions** (You asked questions if you did not understand someone.)

   _____ **Not giving advice** (You did not tell anyone what they should do.)

   _____ **Non-judgmental listening** (You listened to each person and did not take sides.)

   _____ **Summarizing the conflict objectives** (You put the problem in your own words.)

2. Did you use any/all of these skills outside of peer mediation? (at home, with friends) Which ones? Where?

3. Have you been able to solve problems better since you have become a peer mediator?

   _____ yes _____ no

4. Do you feel the peer mediation program was helpful in **any or all** of the following ways?

   _____ Less violent behavior happening at school

   _____ **More** problem-solving and agreements reached between students

   _____ **Less** teacher help in solving student problems

   _____ Better leadership skills in yourself

   _____ Feel better about yourself

   _____ School is a nicer place to learn.

5. How would you improve the peer mediation program? (What changes would you make?) What did you like about the program?

APPENDIX E

PEER MEDIATION PILOT PROGRAM
TEACHER SURVEY
March 2000

1. Do you feel you were given adequate information about the Peer Mediation Program?

   _____ YES _____ NO

2. Have you encouraged students to use Peer Mediation?

   _____ YES _____ NO

3. Have you noticed _____ LESS _____MORE _____ SAME
   physical conflicts in school since Peer Mediation began?

4. Do you think the students are more considerate of each other since Peer Mediation began?

   _____ YES _____ NO

5. Are you spending _____ MORE _____LESS _____ SAME time intervening in
   student conflicts since Peer Mediation?

6. Please share any thoughts, suggestions, or comments about the Peer Mediation Program.

7. Would you like a Peer Mediation Program to continue in the school?

   _____ YES _____ NO

APPENDIX F

PEER MEDIATOR STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE
March 2000

1. Do you know about the Peer Mediation Program in your grade?
   _____ YES _____ NO

2. Have you used Peer Mediation in school?
   _____ YES _____ NO

   If YES, did you work out your problem?
   _____ YES _____ NO

3. If you did not use Peer Mediation, which of these reasons best tell why you did not?

   _____ Didn't want anyone to know I was going to Peer Mediation.
   _____ Solved the problem without help.
   _____ Asked the teacher for help.
   _____ Other (Please write about it.)

   _____

   _____

4. Do you think Peer Mediation helped to make the school safer?
   _____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

5. Do you think there are less fights in the school since Peer Mediation?
   _____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

6. Do you think there is less teasing since Peer Mediation?
   _____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

7. Do you think there is less spreading of rumors and gossip since Peer Mediation?
   _____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

8. Would you like to be a Peer Mediator?
   _____ YES _____ NO

9. Please write any feelings, suggestions, or comments you may have about Peer Mediation.
   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

10. I am a _____ BOY _____ GIRL.

APPENDIX G

PEER MEDIATOR FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE
March 2000

1. Peer Mediation helped kids solve problems.

_____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

2. Sometimes there is more than one way to solve a problem.

_____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

3. Peer Mediation has helped me become a better listener.

_____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

4. Do you think Peer Mediation helps make school a safer place?

_____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

5. I liked being a Peer Mediator.

_____ YES _____ NO _____ DON'T KNOW

6. Please write something you have learned by being a Peer Mediator.

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Would you change anything about the Peer Mediation Program? What?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Would you like to be a Peer Mediator next year? _____ YES _____ NO

9. I am a _____ BOY _____ GIRL.

APPENDIX H

PEACE CURRICULUM RESOURCE

The Peers in Education Addressing Conflict Effectively Program (PEACE).
A Joint project by the Office of the Attorney General and the State Bar of Wisconsin.

As of May 2000, individuals interested in learning more about the PEACE training and curriculum materials can contact either of the two offices listed below.

Dee Runaas
Law-related Education Coordinator
State Bar of Wisconsin
P.O. Box 71258
Madison, WI 53707-7158
(800) 362-8096.

Lisa P. Taylor
Assistant Attorney General
Wisconsin Department of Justice
P.O. Box 7857
Madison, WI 53707-857
(608) 267-7163